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SUBJECT: LIBYA PROTEST'S ISRAEL'S STRIKES ON GAZA, CALLS FOR "MEANINGFUL" UNSC ACTION

CLASSIFIED BY: Gene A. Cretz, Ambassador, U.S. Embassy - Tripoli, U.S. Dept of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) MFA Secretary for European Affairs and senior regime figure Abdulati Obeidi convoked P-5 chiefs of mission on December 28 to denounce Israel's airstrikes against the Gaza Strip.

The meeting was filmed and televised by the state-owned Jamahiriya News Agency (JANA). Describing strikes by the region's most powerful military force against Palestinians in Gaza as "unjust and disproportionate", Obeidi claimed the attacks were a "political and electoral gambit" whose timing was at least partly dictated in part by Israel's upcoming elections and domestic political concerns. Israel said its strikes were intended to deter further rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip; however, the disparity between the "anxiety" prompted by Hamas' rocket attacks and the mass casualties caused by the IDF strikes suggested that Israel's real goal was to fundamentally alter facts on the ground in Gaza. The ongoing strikes in Gaza were of a piece with Israel's historic policy of "exterminating" senior Hamas leaders as a means by which to destabilize the situation in the West Bank and Gaza. Dutifully noting that the parties and international actors should fully consider a one-state endgame in line with the "Isratine" concept articulated by Muammar al-Qadhafi, Obeidi contrasted the "unfairness" of international intervention in Iraq, Sudan and elsewhere and the international community's reluctance to sanction Israel.

¶2. (C) Libya and Arab League states with whom it has been in touch believe the "correct address for action" is the UNSC. Libya wants a "balanced and binding" resolution that would: 1) call for an immediate end to rocket attacks; 2) an immediate cessation of Israeli military operations in and around Gaza, and: 3) an immediate lifting of the blockade against Gaza to permit the flow of humanitarian assistance. (Note: Arab ambassadors were also summoned on December 28 by MFA Secretary for Arab Affairs Muhammad Siala to hear Libya's views on a putative UNSCR. End note.) In something of a departure from typical Libyan positions on Arab-Israeli questions, Obeidi acknowledged that the IDF strikes had been a response to the rocket attacks from Gaza. He candidly conceded that there were intra-Palestinian disagreements that only the Palestinians themselves could resolve, and said other Arab actors had not previously been as positive or pro-active as they could or should have been.

3) Responding to the French Ambassador's question as to whether Libya might support a UNSC Presidential Statement in lieu of a UNSCR, Obeidi stressed Libya's strong preference for "meaningful action" in the form of a binding resolution, but was careful not to rule out the possibility of a Presidential Statement. Underscoring the Arabs' position and dismissing previous UNSCRs, the Annapolis process and the Arab Initiative as "timid and ineffectual", he stressed that Libya "does not want just empty words and wishful thinking".

¶4. (C) Comment: The consensus view among the P-5 COM's was that Libya's position was more balanced than had been expected, and that while Libya was keen to achieve a binding resolution, it was ready to talk and perhaps consider a UNSC Presidential Statement or other alternatives to a UNSCR. End comment.

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